Constructing 'corrupted village wives and urban men' through multilingual performances

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A B S T R A C T

This article analyzes the sociolinguistic construction of two gendered figures in multilingual performances, namely a category of young Mongol wives in rural societies who challenge patriarchal social order, and a group of young urban Mongol men whose dream is to be rich and indulge themselves in luxury. By drawing on the analytical framework of stance and stylization, the study analyzes how the performers' multivalent stance-taking towards constructed personas and specific social-moral orders are communicated through their skillful stylization of multilingual resources in Inner Mongolia. It also points out that language stylization and stance-taking, taking place in reference to local cultural values and linguistic ideologies, are anchored in continually evolving ethnic, gender, and class relationships in a changing, minoritized Mongolian society in the context of Chinese modernization and capitalist marketization. (Stance-taking, language stylization, gendered discourses, Mongols, multilingualism)*

I N T R O D U C T I O N

In places like Inner Mongolia, an ethnic minority region in northern China, the process of cultural contact and language shift produces complex, blended, and multilayered linguistic and cultural identities and practices. This article focuses on linguistic stylization, persona construction, and stance-taking in multilingual Mongolian performances in Inner Mongolia. It provides a rare glimpse into the usage of different varieties of Mongolian and Chinese languages by bilingual Mongol performers to index multiple stances and to simultaneously construct two comic personas who straddle different spatial-temporal frames and ethnolinguistic boundaries: a corrupted Mongolian village wife and a fallen young urban Mongol man. Sociolinguistic research has defined stance as 'a public act by a social actor, achieved dialogically through overt communicative means (language, gesture, and other symbolic forms), and how social actors simultaneously evaluate objects, position subjects, and align with other subjects through taking up stances

with respect to any salient dimension of value in the sociocultural field' (Du Bois 2007:169). Numerous works thus far have examined how stance-taking is accomplished through phonological, morphological, and lexical choices (Kiesling 2001; Eckert 2008; Goodwin & Alim 2010; Johnstone 2011). Scholars have also attempted to bring together the analytical frames of stance in interaction with the sociolinguistic focus on stylization in relation to various salient social categories such as race or gender (King 2018). Making productive use of Bakhtin's (1981) notion of stylization—'an artistic representation of another's linguistic style'— sociolinguists interrogated how styling appropriates, explores, reproduces, or challenges influential images and stereotypes of groups that speakers themselves either belong to or do not belong to (Rampton 1999; Thompson 2010; Coupland 2011). Hence, sociolinguistic stylizations act as stance markers and do ideological works in that 'style is at its foundation ideological, and the stylistic form of propositions is very much a part of their meaning' (Eckert 2012:98).

Satires of the affective style of members of a dominant white group, which is best documented by Basso for the Western Apache, has shown that Western Apache spoofs of the 'White-man' are loud and exuberant, in contrast to everyday interactions (Basso 1979). Barrett (1999), likewise, has shown how African American drag queens adopt multiple styles—namely the use of a 'white woman' style in addition to African American and gay male styles—in ways that challenge racist and homophobic ideologies even while leaving unchallenged certain misogynistic assumptions. Similarly, Bucholtz & Lopez (2011) in their analysis of linguistic minstrelsy in Hollywood films find that white actors draw on often simplistic linguistic stereotypes of African Americans in their racial crossing into black characters to parody unauthentic African Americans temporarily embodied by white male protagonists in films. In such metaparodic minstrelsy, racial stereotypes are hidden behind parodic stance-taking towards white male characters (Bucholtz & Lopez 2011). Most recently, Weninger & Li (2022), in their analysis of a Chinese online celebrity—Papi Jiang's—artful construction of a multitude of online personas, shows how linguistic and non-linguistic resources act as stance markers and contribute to Papi Jiang's critical-satirical performative style. As such, stylization, while making effective use of social and affective meaning of signs directly or indirectly, indexes speakers' or performers' multivalent stances, including attitudes, feelings, judgments, or commitments concerning the constructed persona. Inspired by this conceptualization of stylization, the rap studies also amply demonstrate that multilingual performers' skillful stylization of linguistic and multimodal resources (Dovchin 2011) realize specific stances aligning with different sources of authority (Alim & Pennycook 2007).

This study, while examining the process of stylization, stance-taking, and persona construction in multilingual Mongolian performances, also takes into consideration the multivalent nature of performers' stances. As Moore & Podesva (2009:452) observe, speakers regularly 'exploit the poly-pragmatic nature of linguistic items to say many things at once'. Surely, more than any

communicative genres, 'performance enables the simultaneous coexistence of multiple, competing complex stances, identities and meanings for both the performer and the audience' (Jaffe 2000:44). To capture the multi-dimensional meanings and stances indexed by language stylization, I attempt to incorporate stance-taking in stylized multilingual performances into the tripartite framework of stances elaborated by Stevanovic & Peräkylä (2014) in the field of interaction studies and action recognition. They are namely, epistemic (displaying 'how knowledgeable people are'), deontic (implying 'what people ought to do'), and emotional stances (referring to 'the valence of emotional expression directed to a co-present or absent target') (Stevanovic & Peräkylä 2014). In the analysis, for instance, I draw attention to how the construction of emotional stance and the persona of a village wife through stylizing mixed Mongolian-Chinese linguistic forms ultimately derive from and are superposed on epistemic stance indexing shared sociolinguistic knowledge and conventional ideas about gender and ethnic relations and implicit deontic stance claiming 'what is the right way of doing things'.

In other words, the exploration of the performers' multiple stance-realization processes reveals that the multilingual performances draw on and produce intersecting identities and ideologies. Not only do these performances play with entrenched dichotomies of men versus women or ideal women versus corrupted women, but they also interdiscursively rely on transposable dichotomies of the 'traditional moral' society versus the 'new immoral' society, community versus the capitalist market, Mongolian languages versus Chinese languages, Mongols versus Han Chinese, and rural Mongol men versus urban Chinese boss in the local contexts. Further, the performers' emotional and epistemic stances are further conditioned by anxieties about blurring ethnic boundaries between Mongols and Han Chinese, and above all, masculine insecurity as shown through the representations of a marginalized class of minority men in post-socialist China (weakening deontic authority). To put it another way, multiple stances in multilingual performances bring dimensions of gender, ethnicity, and class into one single speech event. In fact, anthropological, literary, and feminist studies in the Muslim world have provided important insights into how gendered discourses in literary and oral genres reflect and constitute shifting politics of class and ethnicity (Abu-Lughod 1998). As Milani & Lazar (2017:331) point out, 'the gender and sexuality nexus itself has become a productive site to investigate how other systems of power and identity markers based on, for example, race, social class, and nationalism intersect in crucial ways in the global south'. Indeed, debates and struggles around women's appropriate place and conduct have long served as ethnonational and linguistic boundary-making (Gal 1978; Piller & Pavlenko 2001; Inoue 2004). Such intersections are nowhere more salient than in multilingual performances in a peripheral minority society in a rapidly changing China. Hence, the study also attempts to shed light on how multiple stance-taking and the stylizing of multilingual resources in the peripheral minority region of China bring this intersection to the fore by unravelling the process of constructing ethnicity-class-encoded gendered personas.

Prior to moving onto the analyses, I briefly introduce Inner Mongolia and sketch the sociolinguistic situation there.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC BACKGROUND OF INNER MONGOLIA

Inner Mongolia was an administrative unit created as a result of the Manchu conquest of the Mongols in the seventeenth century (Bulag 2002). On the eve of the collapse of the Manchu Qing Empire (1644–1912), in 1911 Outer Mongolia—the country today known as Mongolia—declared its independence. This left the status of the other part of the traditional Mongolian lands—Inner Mongolia—as an unresolved question until the late 1940s. During these four decades, Inner Mongolia became a site of contested sovereignty as it underwent sociopolitical turbulence and intensified colonization under the rule of Chinese warlords (1911–1928), the Chinese Nationalist government (1928–1947), and Japanese colonial rule (1931–1945), to which the rise of Inner Mongolian nationalism and revolutions added yet another twist (Atwood 2002). Shortly after World War II, Inner Mongolian nationalists agitated for unification with independent Mongolia. However, the Yalta Conference in 1945 doomed this unification effort and determined its integration into China. Ultimately, the area of Inner Mongolia was won by Chinese Communist forces and established as the first non-Han nationality autonomous government in 1947 (X. Liu 2006).

Two years later, in 1949, the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC) firmly established the status of Mandarin Chinese as a powerful national language among the Inner Mongols. In the time since, the initially promised autonomous rights of Mongols have been increasingly curtailed. Today Mongols as the titular nation in Inner Mongolia constitute a minority of around 4.2 million. They comprise around seventeen percent of the population of Inner Mongolia, with the remainder being mainly made up of Han Chinese, who have increasingly settled there during the last century. Despite the co-official status of Mongolian with Mandarin Chinese in the autonomous region, as with many minority regions, the public domains where Mongolian is used are restricted to Mongolian schools, media, publishing houses, and other Mongolian cultural entrepreneurial spaces. A relatively fixed and oppositional sociolinguistic indexicalization of Mongolian = tradition = Mongols and Mandarin Chinese = modernity = Han Chinese has also formed, alongside which various other regional dialects and mixed forms are either enregistered as informal/comic, especially in performance genres or stigmatized in broader society (Grey 2021).

Despite the initial uneven spread of Mandarin Chinese among different Mongol groups, in the last four decades as the market economy, urbanization, and Chinese nation-building gather momentum, (Mandarin) Chinese has inevitably entered the linguistic repertoires of almost all Mongols regardless of where they reside. However, the differences in generations, in schooling experiences, and in linguistic

and cultural environments in which one is socialized have given rise to various types of bilingual Mongols, ranging from predominantly monolingual Mongolian speakers with limited Chinese language proficiency (though this is becoming rare, most are elderly Mongols living in rural areas) to bilingual biliterate Mongols to semi-Mongolian speakers. Regardless of this diversity within bilingual Mongols, their everyday spoken Mongolian is peppered with Chinese to different degrees and code-switching is ubiquitous (Schatz 2012).

To be sure, Mongols' contact with Chinese languages well predates the rule of the PRC regime. Pertinent to this study, both the Khorchin region in eastern Inner Mongolia and the southern edges of the Chakhar region in central Inner Mongolia bordering Chinese provinces, where the two performers hailed from respectively, witnessed relatively early and intense contact with incoming Chinese settlers. As Atwood (2004:89) introduces, for instance, 'From the 18th and 19th centuries, unofficial Chinese colonization nibbled away steadily at the Chakhars' southern boundaries. In 1903, with the sinicizing New Policies, the Qing court forced the Chakhar right-flank banners to accept massive new colonization, which was further accelerated by railway construction from 1907 on'. As such, the prolonged contact between Chakhar Mongols and Han Chinese settlers in the last century means that Chakhar Mongols, in particular those living in townships in the southern part where many Han Chinese dwell, are exposed to the Chinese Jin dialect on a daily basis and may have mastered some registers of it in addition to learning Mandarin Chinese at school. Similarly, in the east, Khorchin Mongols bore the brunt of colonization and land reclamation heavily, and were eventually forced to take up farming on their increasingly limited plots of land and settle down gradually in sedentary villages since the early twentieth century (Burensain 2017). The Khorchin Mongolian dialect spoken by these agricultural Mongols has long been infamous for mixing Mongolian with Chinese (Bulag 2003). In addition, in the last decade or so in performative contexts the dialect is, disparagingly or fondly, enregistered as humorous depending on who uses it to label whom. As I show below, throughout the performances, the performers from these two multicultural Mongolian regions, where linguistic contact and cultural cross-fertilization between Mongols and Han Chinese has been taking place for more than a century, playfully stylize all of the linguistic emblems meaningful within 'local horizons of significance' (Pennycook 2007:101). Finally, the social contexts of the performances under analysis include rapid urbanization, the infiltration of neoliberal and Chinese-led market economy into the national periphery, and the subsequent reinforced socioeconomic and cultural marginality of Mongols in China since the early 2000s (Zhang, Yeh, & Tan 2021). The two multilingual performances in a way speak to a myriad of recent changes happening within the community through the prism of ethnicity-class-infused gendered personas.

The multilingual performances that constitute the units of analysis caught my attention in late 2014 and 2019 respectively, when both generated heated debates in Mongolian media spaces. Although the media commentaries, most of which

attacked the performers' mixed language uses (see Baioud & Khuanuud 2022 for Mongolian linguistic purism), and the subsequent interviews conducted by Mongolian TV with the two performers are themselves worth exploring, for the purpose of this study I limit myself to the sociolinguistic constructions of personas and stance-taking in the performances. But in the analysis, I do refer to, for instance, media interview data, my own informal chat with one of the performers, and the insights gained during my intermittent stays in Inner Mongolia between 2014 and 2019.

LINGUISTIC STYLIZATION AND PARODIC STANCE

The first folksong *Shin chagiin **xiao xi fu'er*** 'Little wives in a new era' was performed during the birthday celebration of an elderly woman in one of the villages in the Khorchin region of eastern Inner Mongolia in 2014, according to the performer Chen Chunsheng (pc, November 2020). The folksong adopts the generic form of a Khorchin Mongolian fiddle story, known as *khuuriin ülger* 'fiddle stories; story-singing', which used to be performed in eastern Inner Mongolia by itinerant bards known as *khuurch* 'fiddlers' (D'Evelyn 2022). The transcribed song comprises forty-seven lines in total and the performance lasted around five minutes. The performer Chen assumes the role of folk artist who has a good finger on the pulse of the community and reprocesses 'raw materials' from that community into art forms. In this particular song, Chen parodies contemporary Mongol village wives who are no longer constrained by the norms of the traditional patriarchal Mongolian rural society, which has undergone rapid transformation in the past two decades due to urbanization (Mungen-sang & Chen 2020). The title of the song itself merits some comment: *Shin chagiin **xiao xi fu'er*** is a hybrid construct. The Chinese expression *xiao xi fu'er*, which I rendered as 'little wives', is often used by men to tease young married women in China, and at times carries a sexual connotation depending on the context. Chen's choice of such a term for Mongol wives in his village carries the sense of teasing and belittling women cross-generically in the current performance and keys the ensuing performance as informal and humorous.

My analysis of the folk song performance is comprised of two parts. First, I explore the stylization of mixed languages, ironic stance-taking, and persona construction in the text. Then I examine the frames and shared moral values projected by and looming over the performance, and how this projected world, saturated with its own ideologies of gender and ethnicity, shape epistemic and deontic stance-taking and further enhance the ironic stance. To be sure, in reality the emerging performance and its projection of multiple frames and stances happen at the same time. But for the sake of analysis, I deal with them separately. The following transcript is taken from the second stanza of the song where the performer fleshes out the persona of a modern village wife and constructs his ironic stance. Stylized switches to Mandarin are boldfaced throughout in the translated text.

(1)   Portraying the wife through impersonating a husband-figure
    1   shileever gej barikh ügei lai,
       'She doesn't cook any more,'
    2   shakhai gej oyokh ügei lai,
       'She doesn't sew anymore,'
    3   shirdej 化-daad barval,
       'She puts heavy **make-up** on her face,'
    4   信息 发-gaad tavikh ügei lai shüü.
       'She sends **text messages** endlessly.'
    5   叔叔大爷 gej 管 ügei lai,
       'She **doesn't care** about the presence of **uncles and elders**,'
    6   chineegereen naadam khiij baina.
       'She teases them unabashedly.'
    7   shin chagiin 小媳妇儿
       '**The little wife** in the new era,'
    8   shirveedön gedegi yag medekh ügei shüü khüi.
       'She doesn't blush at all hey.'
    9   高跟 saikhan 皮鞋 gaan gülis getel jülgüjai.
       'She wears sparkling and bedazzling **high heels**,'
   10   高装袜子 ni gaduur bas
       'On top of **the stockings**,'
   11   高级短裤 ömsjai khüi.
       'She sports **classy mini shorts** hey,'
   12   davkhar alag nüdni degüür 假睫毛 gej naaduljai khüi.
       'She attaches **false eyelashes** on top of her big eyes with double-eyelids hey,'
   13   daling saikhan süikhee khoyar chikhindee sajiljai khüi.
       'She dangles a pair of big hoop earrings from her ears hey,'
   14   大大 nertai 泡泡糖-i püs getel üleejai
       'She blows bubbles with **da da brand gum** and makes "püs" sounds,'
   15   大老板 taarval taniaad avbal yamar bi khüi.
       'She comes across a **big boss** hey and tries to be noticed.'
   16   迪厅 getel 歌厅 ged,
       'She frequents **bars** and **karaoke**,'
   17   düüjin 半夜 boltal 聚 nee,
       'She **parties** till **midnight**,'
(In the remaining part, the husband tries to elicit sympathy via verses such as "I am sitting alone at home in darkness, one button from my shirt is missing and no one stitches it for me…"; and finally in the coda the husband delivers persuasion and a warning.)

    In excerpt (1), a dramatized image of the modern village wife emerges through Chen's skillful stylization of the Khorchin Mongolian dialect. In particular, the stylization of Chinese loans on stage, which are given extra stress throughout—such as 化妆 'to do makeup', 信息 'text messages', 高跟鞋 'high heels', 高级短裤 'classy mini shorts', 高装袜 'stockings', 假睫毛 'false eyelashes', 大大泡泡糖 'dada brand gum', and 大老板 'big boss', 聚 'partying', 歌厅 'karaoke', and 舞厅 'bars'—indexes a parodic stance. Most notably, the embodiment of all of these

trappings of modernity by the stylized Chinese loans evokes the conventional asso-
ciation of Mandarin Chinese with modernity. The stylization of various languages
during the performance, apart from serving poetic functions such as rhyming
throughout, crucially further affirms the indexical links: modernity = Mandarin
Chinese versus tradition = Mongolian. It is this indexical fixity and ethnonational
boundaries that are transgressed by the little wife projected in this performance.
Consequently, her donning of modern and fashionable outfits is rendered even
more burlesque by the performer's heightened stress on some Mongolian verbs
and adverbs, which adds extra luster to the Chinese loans. For instance, in line 3
when the persona's manner of applying makeup to her face is described, Chen
not only relies on a shift to Chinese expression 化妆 'to do makeup', but also
resorts to a highly hyperbolic Mongolian verb *shirdej* 'to paint/brush' to dramatize
how the little wife overuses makeup. The immediate meaning evoked by the verb
shirdej is to brush walls or windowpanes with new paint. This dramatized image
is enhanced further in line 5, where the little wife's extent of teasing 叔叔大爷
'uncles and elders' is described in Mongolian as *chinegeree* 'with all her might
and main', meaning 'unabashedly'. Similarly, the wife's high heels are mentioned,
the brilliance of which is highlighted as *gülis* 'bedazzling' after being polished, im-
plying that the shoes are so shiny that they are competing with each other to be
noticed. Further, in line 12 what sits underneath fake eyelashes is *davkhar alag
nüd* 'the big eyes with double eyelids', another instance of hyperbole. One final
example is Chen's choice of the Mongolian verb *sajiljai* 'dangle' when he describes
the way in which the hoop earrings dangle from the wife's ears (line 13). *Sajiljai*
often implies that something is moving back and forth uncontrollably, for instance,
in storms. If earrings are *sajiljai,* the wearer is most likely walking or moving
around with little elegance—a trait further supported by how the persona blows
bubbles with chewing gum and makes an unpleasant *püs* sound (line 14).

It is the pairing of Chinese loans with hyperbolic Mongolian expressions that
unfailingly produces roars of laughter in the video and invites the audience to be
co-participants in constructing ironic stance. To be sure, a variety of resources
including prosodic salience, prominent facial expressions, intonation, audience
laughter, as well as the husband's meta-talk about feelings ("I am sitting alone at
home in darkness… no one stitches the shirt buttons for me") enhance the emotion-
al valance by dramatizing the figure. But a full appreciation of the persona construc-
tion and ironic stance-taking must take place against a moral frame-space activated
and yet backgrounded throughout excerpt (1).

PROJECTING THE MORAL WORLD AND CONSTRUCTING THE PERSONA OF AN IDEAL MONGOL WIFE

In this section, I argue that language stylization as well as other affect-encoded tools
not only construct the persona of a modern village wife and parodic stance, they also

simultaneously and indirectly bring the ghost of a 'traditional and ideal' wife and the moral world inhabited by her into the context of performance. In other words, stylized performance and ironic stance shape two personas at the same time—the visible and the invisible. For instance, in (1) the modern wife's inability to cook and sew (lines 1–2), her unabashed joking with her husband's uncles and elder brothers (lines 5–6), and most crucially, her obsession with outward appearance, partying, and flirting with big bosses (line 15), which will potentially give her a bad reputation, function as 'double entendre' (Freud 1905/1976), and concurrently, albeit in a somewhat suppressed manner, animate the persona of ideal women in traditional Khorchin Mongolian villages. For example, the prerequisites for a good wife in the previous social order include the following three attributes: industriousness and dexterity in needle work, a good family upbringing that includes knowledge about and observance of social etiquette and rules, and finally, a good reputation, which is the most important prerequisite in choosing brides in traditional Khorchin villages (Pao 1964a,b). In particular, one of the important taboos in traditional Mongolian society is that a younger brother's wife cannot joke with her husband's elder brothers, who, in turn, cannot remain alone in a room with a younger brother's wife (Jagchid & Hyer 1979). In other words, inappropriate interactions between a young wife and her husband's elderly male relatives were socially sanctioned. Recalling how the little wife teases her husband's uncles and brothers without restraint (lines 5–6), we now realize that the performer renders the little wife ludic exactly by implicitly evoking the traditional taboo and inviting the audience to be co-participants in the construction of his epistemic stance.

All of these values and moral discourses surrounding 'proper' behaviors of women, despite the eclipse of the local Mongol community and of tradition, have not disappeared fully. Rather, they are oriented to at different times and act as the source of epistemic authority to caricaturize contemporary young Mongol women and to make a subtle request for morally acceptable future actions (deontic stance). Indeed, it is this implicit intertextual and voicing contrast recognizable to the community members that forms a fertile ground to laugh at and critique a deviant figure who embodies nothing but the exact opposites of the ideal women of traditional society. This contrast, though not explicitly mentioned in excerpt (1), is built into and lingers over every single line of the song and stylizations therein. In fact, even prior to slipping into the role of a village husband and shaping the persona of a corrupted modern wife through effective alternation of two linguistic codes in excerpt (1), Chen projected the invisible frame looming over the emerging text at the preliminary part of the performance as, for instance, shown by Chen's monologue delivered without any accompaniment of music (see excerpt (2)), which is then followed by the sung verses in excerpt (1).

(2)   The prologue
     1 形式社会 改变-aad 新社会 bolj shüü,
        'Our **previous moral society** is **replaced** with **a new society**,'

2 新社会 bolsonos naash sanaa sanaagaraan boljai.
  'Since we stepped into **the new society** people began to do what they want.'
3 sanaan dni khürkh ügei bol salj butarana gej aashilaad,
  'Wives threaten their husbands with divorce papers if their hearts' desire cannot be met.'
4 khadam eejiin khal ügei lai shüü odo.
  'Mothers-in-law lost their status and power now.'
5 khadam eejn bereediin khali amsaad,
  'It is the wives who are tormenting their mothers-in-laws.'
6 dukhan dereen jalbiraj bainaa:"burkhan aa, en chin yamar 社会 bolson bi?"
  'And mothers-in-laws are praying and sighing "Oh, God! What **society** are we living in <u>now</u>?"'
7 öngrüü galbaljuuri olsonni ödör shön ügei jovood,
  'The man who found a willful and ostentatious girl suffers from a headache day and night,'
8 övdögöön alagdaad khelj baina genee.
  'Being driven mad, he is sighing and saying:…'
  (A four-stringed fiddle is played and singing started below.)

Hence, at the onset of the performance, Chen's implicit summoning of a naturalized set of knowledge about the old society activated through temporal deictics such as *previous* and *now*, acts as a key intertextual resource and a source of epistemic authority that invites others to appraise the little wives in the new society and to be co-participants in stance-taking in the ensuing sung performance accompanied by a four-stringed fiddle. In addition, the performer's introduction of the personas of mothers-in-law and husband (line 6 and line 8 respectively) accomplishes two important tasks. First, persona-inhabiting, in this case as a form of explicit quotation of others' speech, as Irvine (1996:149) points out, 'insulates the pragmatic speaker from personal responsibility for the spoken words'. Second, the introduction of the persona of mothers-in-law, in particular, through her speech, "Oh, God! What **society** are we living in **now**?", projects a frame abstracted two steps away from the speech event frame. Hence in this prologue, we are presented with three frames: the world of emerging performance, the 'incomprehensible, disorienting, and immoral' new world projected in the direct quotation of frustrated mothers-in-law, and the 'past' moral world implicitly projected by the temporal deictic NOW in the quoted utterance (line 4 and line 6). Here, the key rhetorical purpose achieved by interlacing three layers of frames is to consolidate the performer's epistemic and deontic status by aligning with and distributing authority/voice to other participants (mothers-in-law and husbands), and by saturating the respective frames inhabited by them with similar emotions (sighing/praying, disappointment/confusion brought by 'the new society'). In other words, Chen historicizes his stances by invoking what Du Bois & Kärkkäinen (2012:440) term 'stance field'—a social force field constituted by the history of stances taken, then and now, yielding a dialogic layering of participants' positions. Once the stances are dialogically layered and the sources of authority are located, Chen

moves on to establish a point-by-point 'voicing contrast' (Agha 2005:42) between the corrupted wives in the new society and (ideal) Mongol wives in bygone days in the second stanza (see excerpt (1)).

Taken together, Chen's effective stylization of local multilingual resources, first and foremost, directly indexes his parodic stance and breathes life into the persona of the little wife in the new society (excerpt (1)), which in turn, indirectly, animates and is animated by the ideal wife and the 'old moral' society embodied by her. I have also shown that the frame of the moral world is in fact projected even before the sung performance takes place through Chen's use of temporal deictics—*previous*, *new*, and *now*—and direct quotations. Overall, Chen's skillful use of linguistic resources constructs two parallel yet opposite figures at the same time, which inter-animate each other and interlace an explicit ironic stance with an indirect epistemic stance taking place simultaneously and left unsaid in the background. And, of course, through taking up ironic and epistemic stances, the performer who inhabits and identifies with the persona of a rural husband, implicitly makes requests for 'appropriate and moral' future actions aligning with traditional norms and patriarchal social order (deontic stance).

In this process of multi-faceted stance-taking, the dichotomy of an ideal wife versus a corrupted wife is mapped onto the parallel frame of the moral society and that of the immoral new society just as the binaries of the Mongolian language versus Mandarin Chinese, tradition versus modernity, and rural Mongol husband versus urban Chinese boss are constructed in the ongoing here-and-now world of performance. These simultaneous frames, just as Jaffe (2000:57) points out in her analysis of bilingual Corsican comedy, 'allow multiple identities—and even multiple ideologies of identity and value—to coexist in a single event or experience'. Such simultaneous embedding of multiple layers of frames and ideologies across time-space through stylizing multiple linguistic codes and stance-taking also allows the performer and his audience 'freedom to position themselves in various ways vis-à-vis the performance and the linguistic and cultural images it evokes' (Jaffe 2000:58). It is precisely through (dis)aligning with multiple stances indexed by stylized performances that participants reflect on and display their orientations to the shifting order of gender, class, and ethnicity.

Linguistic stylization indexes multiple stances and hence negotiates shifting gender, ethnic, and class relations, which is discussed in the following analysis of the multilingual rap song '50 50' parodying young Mongol men who are floating aimlessly in the waves of the market economy and consumerist society and dreaming about metamorphosizing themselves into the big boss desired by the village wife portrayed above.

CONSTRUCTING FALLEN YOUNG MONGOL MEN THROUGH THE RAP '50 50'

The second performance, the rap song '50 50' performed by Axeman, was first premiered on YouTube on December 9, 2019. Subsequently, it was released on the

Mongolian App Ehshig 'Tunes', akin to Spotify, and became one of its top rap hits. Axeman's real name is Sükh-baatar, and he is from the Chakhar region in central Inner Mongolia. He used to be a member of the Mongolian rap band Partisan 'The Guerrilla', more widely known as PTS which was founded in 2005. It is one of the first Mongolian rap bands of Inner Mongolia (see Nachin 2013). The rap '50 50' is Axeman's first solo work produced with an international team comprising of Russians and Buryats in Ulan-Ude, the capital of Republic of Buryatia in Russian Far East, as well as Mongols in Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia in China. He wrote the lyrics himself and spent almost two years working on the rap, based on an interview he had with *Inner Mongolia Daily* in December 2019. An urban Mongol who is parodied and constructed in the song '50 50' wastes his meager income on partying and drinking and derives joy from posting his revelry on social media. He also dreams about a phantasmagoric rich man, driving posh cars, and being surrounded by bikini-clad female beauties. To a large extent, the rap '50 50' critiques the menace of consumerism and the market in China (see Sun 2020). I now proceed to show how the racialized, classed, and gendered personas and language stylization map onto each other and to what effect.

The visuals in the video clip of the rap song '50 50' draw heavily on gangster imagery and construct a hyper-masculine persona as shown in the visual cues of tattoos, glamorous leather jackets, sport cars, gold chains, sexy women, and stacks of dollars spread over a gambling table. The video thus reproduces imageries that are stereotypical of commercial US rap videos. The title of the song, which is drawn from the song refrain, is worth some explanation. The numeral 50, pronounced as *tavi*, is a homophone. It can also mean 'to release, to put something down, to turn on (such as TV/radio/music)'. It is also Mongolian slang meaning 'to beat/batter someone, or to make love to someone', associated with young Mongol men. In the following part, the analysis focuses on Axeman's stylizing different codes including standard Mongolian, Mandarin, and a local Chinese Jin dialect spoken in central Inner Mongolia by Han Chinese, and persona construction. The first part of the lyrics are given in excerpt (3) below.

(3)

1 Oroi suuya neg khünii 50 50 50
 'Let's party tonight, each person pays fifty fifty fifty'
2 Terg mergee gerteen 50 50 50
 'Put your cars at home put it home put it home put it home'
3 Khuar baigad daguulkh ügei bol 50 50 50
 'If one knows an escort and chooses not to bring her to the party, beat him beat him
 beat him'
4 Suuld irsen ni gurvan chomoo 50 50 50
 'If one is late to the party, drink three glasses drink them drink them'

In this verse in excerpt (3), the rapper, while underlining his imaginary persona's relish of drinking and partying, hints that the protagonist is certainly not well-to-do as he asks everyone to pay 50RMB (7USD) for a party. In the ensuing part, the protagonist's request for his friends to bring a *khuar,* a local slang meaning 'escort', if they know any from another aspect also insinuates his financially strained situation in that he cannot afford those professional entertainers to spice up the party. *Khuar,* literally meaning 'flower', is Mongolian slang used by Inner Mongol youth referring to girls who frequent bars and act as men's companions, perhaps sharing certain but not full resemblance with escorts. Thus, in these four lines Axeman unfolds the partying scene of a particular social category of young Mongols who do not have ample financial means but wish to be seen as though they do.

In the ensuing lines, Axeman's playful and exaggerated stylization of young Mongols' code-switching practice dramatizes the parodic imagery of a group of young Mongol men, for whom partying also means posting and sharing the revelry on various social media platforms ranging from WeChat to Instagram to Facebook. Here, all of the online platforms are referenced either in Mandarin or in English and the polysemous 50 is fully exploited (see excerpt (4)).

(4)

5 状态 muu bol uulgan ügei 50 50 50
'If you are **not feeling well**, put down your glass, put it down put it down put it down'
6 手机 deer mini duu-i 50 50 50
'Play my song on your **phone**, play it play it play it'
7 视频 拍-gaad 朋友圈 daan 50 50 50
'**Post a video** on your **WeChat Moment**, post it post it post it'
8 Facebook Instagram deer 50 50 50
'Post it on Instagram and Facebook post it post it post it'
9 Youtube bas 优酷 deer 50 50 50…
'Post it on YouTube and **Youku**, post it post it post it)…'

In excerpt (4), the rapper's playful stylization of mixed Mandarin and (standard) Mongolian indexes young Mongols' hybrid and modern identities. After all, the persona is constructed as a guru in the world of social media and various entertainment apps, which are nationally and globally popular. Therefore, what is perhaps more significant than the reproduction of fixed binary of mainstream identity versus ethnic minority identity in the stylization of mixed codes is transgressive playfulness and hybrid potential, which in turn builds an urban masculine image characterized by hyper-male bravado.

In the rap '50 50', the creative stylization and dismantling of binary constructions listed above become more evident in excerpt (5). At this point, sporting a blue traditional Mongolian dress and sitting on a lofty and gilded chair resembling the one used by Mongolian royals in the past, Axeman stylizes Chinese Jin dialect (see Figure 1).

FIGURE 1. Axeman rapping in the Chinese Jin dialect (a screenshot from YouTube).

(5) The stylized Chinese Jin dialect verse
  10 我是内蒙老大级别说唱明星
      'I'm the top rap star from Inner Mongolia,'
  11 来自锡盟镶黄旗，镶黄旗
      'I'm from Bordered Yellow Banner in Shilingol league,'
  12 我是内蒙老大级别说唱明星
      'I'm the top rap star from Inner Mongolia,'
  13 来自锡盟镶黄旗，镶黄旗
      'I'm from Bordered Yellow Banner in Shilingol league.'
  14 等我有钱兰博基尼，把个美女穿比基尼
      'If I am a rich man, I will buy a Lamborghini and charm a beauty dressed in a bikini,'
  15 驾个宾利中山路上随便转
      'I will buy a Bentley and take a leisurely drive on Zhongshan road,'
  16 中午早点内蒙饭店
      'I will have my breakfast and lunch in Inner Mongolia Hotel,'
  17 兄弟开上玛莎拉蒂
      'My bro, take your Maserati with you,'
  18 香格里拉王府井我专门串
      'Let's hang around Shangri 'la Hotel and Wang Fu Jing Mall,'
  19 交警不敢拦我再说车速又不快
      'Police dare not to stop us, we are not speeding anyway,'

20 万达影院 VIP 实况足球
  'Let's go to Wanda IMAX and watch a live football match in a VIP room,'
21 国产垃圾电影咱们一概不稀罕
  'We won't take even one look at those made-in-China trash movies.'
(The refrain follows)

Prior to impersonating the imaginary rich man, in the beginning of the stylized Chinese Jin dialect verse Axeman inserted a self-referential speech and boasted that he is 老大级别说唱明星 'the top rap star' of Inner Mongolia (lines 10–14). This, despite its boastful tone, is a self-irony because of the immeasurable gap between the glamourous title of rap star and the miserable economic prospect of being a Mongol rapper in Inner Mongolia, where hip hop has an extremely limited market, and most rappers are not able to support themselves with their performances at bars and annual music festivals (Nachin 2013). Often, rappers need additional employment to support themselves. For a period, the lifeline of Axeman's music career was sustained largely by a small restaurant run by him. Hence, his self-reference as the top rap star in Inner Mongolia is self-mockery that plays with the gap between his version of being an almost impoverished top star and the stereotypical image of opulent top stars. It is not too far-fetched to state that through this self-irony Axeman temporarily loses himself in the character and forms an identification with the persona he is building. Crucially, the delivery of self-irony via the medium of the Chinese Jin dialect creates a safe distance to deride himself.

Clearly, the mention of his hometown 镶黄旗 'Bordered Yellow Banner' is a continuation of his self-parodic act in that it indexes marginality. Banner is a county-level administrative division, and the Bordered Yellow Banner is one of the Chakhar Banners in central Inner Mongolia. This peripheral locality, which is almost unknown to his non-Mongol fans, pokes fun at his self-designated status of a top rap star. Surely, such references to familiar places such as Bordered Yellow Banner, as well as those landmarks in Hohhot, such as Shangri 'la Hotel, Wang Fu Jing shopping mall, Inner Mongolia Hotel, Wanda IMAX cinema, and Zhongshan road in the subsequent lines constitute the well-known localization device in hip hop linguistics (Pennycook 2007; J. Liu 2013).

Above all, the stylized performance of the Chinese Jin dialect indexes Axeman's ironic stance and constructs the persona of a young Mongol man whose fantasy is to be rich, to drive posh cars, and to lure a beauty dressed in bikini (lines 14–21). The Jin dialect projects the persona of a marginalized, lower-class, and young Mongol man, for whom all the glamor offered by global capitalist production and the socialist market economy is unreachable. It is this impossibility to reverse his fate which makes his fantasy even more hilarious. For instance, he would not watch made-in-China movies if he can one day become a VIP in IMAX cinema. And he would eat his lunch and breakfast in the Inner Mongolia Hotel and take a

leisurely drive with his new Bentley, which immediately evokes tropes of pompous nouveau riche engaged in Inner Mongolia's booming mining industry. Here, Axeman's stylization of the Chinese dialect of central Inner Mongolia serves one key rhetorical purpose: to parody a marginal and underprivileged young man whose fantasy embodies a complex consciousness of resistance and resignation to reality—a reality in which he is in fact only able to host a party if everyone pays 50RMB (7USD) to cover the cost and if someone brings a *khuar* (excerpt (3)).

Further, Axeman's parodic stance-taking in the rap '50 50' does not only materialize a gendered figure but also plays with ethnolinguistic boundaries as with Chen's construction of a modern village wife in the previous case. For instance, Axeman's donning of traditional Mongolian dress—a highly ideologized cultural symbol in Inner Mongolia (Baioud 2021)—and his sitting on a royal chair while crossing into the language of Chinese migrants—the Chinese Jin dialect—break the ethnosemiotic boundary and straddle a range of local linguistic and cultural repertoires. Throughout the rap '50 50', the creative synthesis and hybridity as displayed through Axeman's stylization of different linguistic and non-linguistic variants including Mandarin, standard Mongolian, and the Chinese Jin dialect as well as other miscellaneous signs index a pluralistic identity that flouts ethnic and cultural boundaries in Inner Mongolia. That is, through mixing linguistic and cultural resources amassed from local, regional, ethnic, national, and international levels '50 50' constructs urban Mongolian subjectivities that embrace pluralism and challenge monolingual and monocultural norms.

GENDER IDEOLOGY AND DEONTIC AUTHORITY

Arguably, language stylization indexing an ironic stance in the rap '50 50' draws on and reproduces the discourse of 'women as commodity' in the portrayal of a partying young man and his imaginary new wealth. In fact, the image of a big boss or new rich in both the rural folksong and urban rap, who are desired by both the village wife and the young and underprivileged Mongol urban man, stands for newly empowered businessmen in the post-reform China. Their performance of 'entrepreneurial masculinity' is carried out through the consumption of women in China. There, the dominant ideology of the post-reform masculinity has been centred on men's capacities to make money and generate economic power (Yang 2010; Xiao 2011). The moral message communicated by these two parodic multilingual performances shows that the capitalist marketization in post-socialist China and the dominant ideology of entrepreneurial masculinity may have caused or reinforced masculine insecurity and anxiety among certain groups of socioeconomically marginalized Mongol men. This anxiety about losing epistemic authority certainly lies behind Chen's multiple stances that animate the 'traditional moral' world to substantiate the rural husband's power in determining the 'right way of doing things'. Similar masculine anxiety also underpins the group of

underprivileged urban Mongol men who aspire for 'ideal masculinity' embodied by the 'successful' men of the Chinese capitalist market system. In that sense, Axeman's stance-taking acts as an implicit critique against the penetration of a Chinese-style modernization and marketization whose disorienting effects on Mongols (men) is dispersed into anxieties about the shifting gendered relations interlinked with class and ethnic dimensions. Axeman's '50 50' precisely mediates and taps into the potential modification and changes precipitated by the Chinese-dominant capitalist economic order in minority regions where men's class status, ethnicity, and hegemonic masculine order are increasingly intertwined. Notably, as mentioned above, parodic stance-taking towards the personas of marginalized, pleasure-obsessed, misogynistic, and daydreaming underclass men, as well as the materialistic world inhabited by them further enregisters (or stigmatizes) language styles such as hybrid linguistic practice and the Chinese Jin dialect as fun and non-serious.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The manipulation of linguistic styles and stance-taking during performances is pivotal in the construction and negotiation of a range of relationships, in the framing of contexts, and in the achievement of temporary transformation and transcendence. This study tries to unravel the layered frames and intertwined ideologies of gender, ethnicity, and class in the highly stylized multilingual performances by training the focus on language stylization, stance-taking, and persona construction. The performances, filled with their respective personas and stances, deliver metacommentaries on traditional and newly emerging values and where we are situated in a world suffused with new desire and crisscrossing boundaries. Both the corrupted Mongol wife and the fallen Mongol man are threshold figures who reside in a *thirdspace* where nothing but hybridity reigns. As Soja (1996:56) observed, 'Thirdspace is a meeting point, a hybrid place, where one can move beyond the existing borders. It is also a place of the marginal women and men, where old connections can be disturbed and new ones emerge'. In this thirdspace inhabited by the two protagonists, namely a village wife and a young urban man, not only are languages interwoven and rub against each other, but modernity encounters tradition, a new ideology of entrepreneurial masculinity rooted in Chinese-dominant market economy clashes with traditional hegemonic masculinity based in a pastoral/agrarian economy, insecure Mongol men meet successful Chinese entrepreneurs, and ideal Mongol women lurk just an inch beneath their commodified counterparts. It is precisely in this meeting place seething with hybridity, cultural untranslatability, shaken deontic authority, ethnolinguistic incompatibility, and burning desires that the materialist yet marginal urban young man and the corrupted yet rebellious village wife are constructed, to be appraised by all, and more importantly to serve as expressive vehicles to imagine, discern, and negotiate rapidly transforming ideological and moral landscape. The

(co)construction of these personas and stances are indeed a process of making sense of one's emplacement amid an entanglement of local, social, and personal relationships.

In that sense, spotlighting stance and stylization also helps us understand how human beings are reflexively engaging with their own culturally constructed social identities, moral categorization, and linguistic ideologies to make sense of themselves and the world. In particular, attending to how emotion, knowledge, and power work together can contribute to understanding the multivocal nature of stylized communicative events. By examining the interlacing of emotional stance, epistemic stance, and the performances' subtle deontic stance communicating the moral message of 'what should be the right way of doing things in this changing world', this analysis demonstrates that inquiries into metapragmatic expressive arts can benefit from tools from interaction studies (e.g. Levinson 1983; Heritage 2012).

In addition, despite their functioning as critiques on changing societal values, these performances first and foremost create bilingual audiences who share the same sociolinguistic knowledge about the pattern of language alternation and the meanings associated with each language variety. The fact that the meanings of the performances are lost on other Mongolian language speaking groups (such as those living in the independent country of Mongolia) shows how the success of these performances in multilingual and peripheral Inner Mongolia are predicated on shared bilingual and bicultural identities of minoritized Mongols residing in China. Such parodic performances, as Jaffe (2000:57) points out in the context of Corsica, 'in a way, can be seen as validating plural or hybrid identities because they constitute living examples of how a hybrid community of practice can recognize and celebrate itself'. However, what differs from the Corsican context studied by Jaffe (2000) is that the rise of Mongolian purist ideology as resistance against the assimilationist language policy of China has made these performances extremely controversial despite their ability to invoke and create bilingual and bicultural audience. After all, both Chen and Axeman's stylized use of mixed languages in their performances encountered backlash and provoked heated debates in Mongolian media spaces for several months. Hence, at present, these multilingual performances' construction and validation of a linguistically hybrid community sits uneasily with minoritized Mongols' rising purist ideology fueled by linguistic insecurity in an assimilation-driven Chinese regime (Baioud & Khuanuud 2022). Finally, the analysis also demonstrates that language stylization and stance-taking apart from making productive use of social meanings of languages, negotiating relationships, and reproducing ideologies, also establish and reproduce indexical links between persona, context, and styles in line with many sociolinguistic studies. In particular, the enregisterment of the Khorchin Mongolian dialect, mixed linguistic forms, and the Chinese Jin dialect as non-prestigious, informal, and at times stigmatized styles are picked up and further consolidated by both performers as they construct comic personas and

stances through these linguistic devices. But we are yet to see how stance-taking in other communicative contexts further complicate the semiotic value of the aforementioned linguistic styles.

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